

Plagiarism in Academia

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Plagiarism sometimes creates legal and ethical problems for students and faculty. It can have serious consequences. Fortunately, there are ways to stop plagiarism. There are many tools available to detect plagiarism, e.g. using software for detecting submitted articles. Also, there are many ways to punish a plagiarist, e.g. banning plagiarists from submitting future articles for publication. In addition, scholarly journals should clearly state their policies regarding plagiarism and require authors to sign a statement indicating that their articles meet the requirements of original work. The reviewers should be supported by the journal's board and editors when they report any occurrences of plagiarism.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the verb "plagiarize" as "to steal and use the ideas or writings of another as one's own." The Oxford Dictionary defines plagiarism as "to take and use another person's thoughts, writing, invention etc. as one's own." As Moulton and Robison (2002) have stated, plagiarism can also be seen as "depriving authors of profit that is rightfully theirs [, which] is theft. Depriving authors of credit might also be a form of theft."

Obviously, plagiarism is a misconduct considered to be unethical and immoral regardless of who commits it. However, people risk getting caught for plagiarism because, if they get away with it, plagiarism can have many rewards. For example, the academic plagiarist might benefit at the expense of the original author in the form of public recognition based on someone else's work, promotion and/or raise in salary, and/or grants or patents. These would all be undeserved rewards. Therefore, plagiarism amounts to receiving undeserved compensation, promotion, grants, patents, or recognition. Thus, plagiarism is unethical, immoral, and—if the plagiarized material is copyright protected—illegal, and it needs to be stopped.

Plagiarism has become a serious problem in academia. For example, Guterman (2008) has reported on recent research revealing that "More than 70,000 article abstracts appeared disturbingly similar to other published work when scanned by a new search program ... The researchers examined 2,600 of these abstracts by hand and found 3 instances of what appears to outright plagiarism." Besides outright plagiarism, there are many examples of double publishing, which mean publishing the same paper in different journals (but not as a reprint). According to Cicutto (2008), "The Office of Research Integrity, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, reports that approximately 25 percent of the total allegations received concern plagiarism, and that these allegations typically represent misunderstandings of what exactly constitute plagiarism and accurate citation procedures." Bleomenkamp et al. (1999) found that a large

proportion of articles in Dutch medical journals have been duplicated. Schein and Paladugu (2001) found that 16 percent of the original articles published in leading surgical journals could be considered redundant publication. Clarke (2006) reported that, "During the review process for this paper, a paper submitted to AIS-sponsored major conference was found to be highly plagiarized. About 70 percent of the paper was copied almost exactly, without quotation marks." Clarke also referred to the case of Scheier (2005), whose article published seven years earlier was plagiarized by someone. Scheier stated that "the author in question has a track-record of plagiarism." According to Schulz (2008), "A chemist in India has been found guilty of plagiarism and/or falsifying more than 70 research papers published in a wide variety of Western Scientific journals between 2004 and 2007."

Plagiarism is not only unethical but also creates a problem for the original author once he/she locates his/her work in another article. For example, Armstrong (1993) recalled that "A young university radiologist recognized his own writing in a professional journal under another's authorship, with attribution to himself." He wrote the author of the article, who responded, "What a remarkable coincidence, great minds think alike." The young radiologist decided not to pursue.

Unfortunately, when one reports a case of allegation, one cannot be sure of its consequences. For example, a case reported by famousplagiarists.com stated the following:

An allegation directed against a member of Argosy University's faculty resulted in what appears to be an attempted institutional cover-up on behalf of a plagiarist. After the student made allegations against Bindu Ganga, "confid[ed] to a professor that she believed Ganga's thesis might have been plagiarized," she herself was accused of ethics violations involving "a pattern of unprofessional comportment...including disrespect toward those in authority!" The Argosy University student,

Marla Decker, did end up receiving her degree after the university tried to have her dismissed, and her “ethics violations” ended up as a “part of her permanent academic record” (D. Newbart, “Student Scolded Over Plagiarism Accusation”).

What a crooked way to deal with plagiarism accusations on the part Argosy University officials! It gets even worse. The title of Ganga's doctoral thesis? Deception vs. Perception: A Critical Look at the Intricacies of Lying Within the Therapeutic Relationship, in which Ganga borrows heavily from sources including Charles Ford's book *Lies! Lies!! Lies!!!* without acknowledging extensive verbatim appropriations.

Thanks to a Turnitin.com “originality report” commissioned by the Sun-Times, the allegations by Argosy University student Marla Decker were substantiated (“a 45% match” as revealed by the “originality report”), and the unethical attempts to silence this student were exposed:

Update: As of March 3, 2006, Argosy University had reversed its earlier position and decided to fire Bindu Ganga over the plagiarism allegations raised by Marla Decker. As reported in the Sun-Times, Argosy “also took away Ganga's doctorate in clinical psychology.” (Newbart, D. “University fires official accused of plagiarism”)

There are many more cases of plagiarism. In an editorial note, Bouysson et al. (2002) described a case of an author caught by a referee stating, “This is the first time I discovered a 100% plagiarism in math publication. Then it struck me that recently I heard about a plagiarist in a letter from a well known mathematician. I found it – it was about Marcu!!” The note further stated that “Marcu is a notorious plagiarist. After further search of Marcu's publication, at least five additional articles were found to be plagiarized.”

An example of communication between a reviewer (of the original article) and the editor of the journal to which a plagiarized article was submitted further illustrates the dilemma. Enders and Hoover (2004) wrote about the response of a reviewer: “A simple rejection along with a refusal to consider future papers is not sufficient. No one would allow similar behavior from a student to go unchecked.” However, the editor responded, “I have received input from our advisory panel and several colleagues. They and I both are concerned about possible liability for the journal of any aggressive course of action.”

When Onsekez (a non-English speaking author) (2002) was caught plagiarizing, he responded in a letter:

For those of us whose mother tongue is not English, using beautiful sentences from other studies on the same subject is not usual... In my case, I aimed to cite all the references from which I sources information, although I may have missed some of them.

Williams (2008) reported that an article by Warda and Han had been withdrawn. The report quotes the editor of a journal stating, “The article has been retracted because it contains apparently plagiarized passages from several previously publishing articles.” In this case, the editor acted as soon as the matter was exposed.

Martin reported (2007) a case in which an author's 1993 article had plagiarized another article published in 1980. According to Martin, “The allegation was investigated, and it was agreed that it was a serious case of plagiarism.” While investigating this author, who has published over 100 articles, two more articles of his were found to be a plagiarized. During the process of investigation, they found the plagiarist's article itself was plagiarized. Martin wondered how such misconduct had gone unchecked for so long. According to Massey and Webster (1997):

In the past, those in academia spoke little of plagiarism; it was just not something that the vast majority of scholarly researchers would consider doing. But the pressure to publish, among other factors, has pushed some academic authors to steal words and ideas from others. Even some well-respected scholars have been found to have liberally “borrowed” from others' work. Many of the allegations arise in the well funded and highly competitive science discipline.

And as Parmley (2000) has stated, “It appears that plagiarism is far more common than many of us suspect. We probably catch only the tip of the iceberg.”

These examples prove that plagiarism exists among academicians, but it is unclear whether many of us are working to take action, perhaps due to lack of time, interest, or fear of consequences. Further, even if reported and investigated, the process is long and the outcomes are unpredictable. However, that does not mean that we should sweep plagiarists under the rug or look the other way at their unethical behavior because this attitude will encourage further plagiarism, and, as a result, the quality of professional research and publications will deteriorate. Further, ignoring plagiarism means condoning unethical behavior, which will only encourage other unethical behaviors, such as falsifying data. In addition, if academicians are allowed to plagiarize, then we really have no ethical grounds for sanctioning students who plagiarize (and one day, they

might plagiarize us!). Therefore, plagiarism is a serious ethical issue and needs to be discussed and discouraged.

There are hundreds of documented cases of plagiarism among academicians and others. However, the purpose of this article is to discuss the issue of plagiarism as it relates to academicians and to suggest ways to control the problem.

Current Literature - The Status of Plagiarism

In a survey of editors of economics journals conducted by Enders and Hoover (2004), the editors considered plagiarism to include: using unattributed sentences (34%), unattributed proof from working paper (58.3%), unattributed proof from published paper (66.1%), unattributed ideas (16.5%), and using privately collected data (47.7%).

Despite these concerns, the majority of editors (81%) did not have a formal policy to deal with these issues. Most felt that requiring the author to sign the copyright agreement assured the originality of the material. Most editors surveyed felt that, since they never encountered a case of plagiarism, they did not need a policy. The editors based their opinions on their experience dealing with situations such as: never encountering a case of plagiarism (83 editors, 71%), encountering one case of plagiarism (28 editors, 24%), or encountering two cases (4 editors, 3.41%). Only two editors surveyed (1.7%) had encountered more than two cases.

However, the concept of plagiarism varied among editors; only one editor (1.81%) responded that the presence of one unattributed sentence was not plagiarism, whereas 34% of respondents considered it definitely to be plagiarism. This suggests confusion in defining plagiarism.

Enders and Hoover (2004) also noted that once editors had detected plagiarism, their method of response varied. The researchers found that 71% said they would definitely notify the author; 23% would definitely notify the author's chair, dean, and provost; 42% would definitely ban future submissions from the author; and 13% would definitely publicize the incident.

Although 35% of the editors stated that their response would be influenced by fear of litigation, 60.5% were not concerned about possible litigation.

Hoover (2006) has stated that an "author might not choose to contest the plagiarized paper even though the author has full knowledge that it originated from her work." Hoover lists the following reasons: "It is not clear that pursuing the case will be successful. Plagiarism has no legal standing, therefore, it is hard to prove," and "It is of hierarchical nature in which an author may have plagiarized work of a subordinate, e.g., a junior colleague or a graduate assistant."

Therefore, Hoover (2006) showed with his Game-

Theoretic Model that plagiarism is possible. His model showed that fighting the case might be too costly for the original author. "Even the threat of a damaged reputation is not a sufficient deterrent to such behavior," says Hoover (2006). Given the hesitancy among some editors, Gotterbarn et al. (2006) stated:

We make the case that all professional organizations that have a publication component should have a strongly articulated position against plagiarism. ...such a position has a social foundation in common understanding of ethical principles including the encouragement of honesty and the discouragement of stealing.

Many organizations have published a code of conduct relating to plagiarism, however. For example, the American Historical Association has included a strong condemnation of plagiarism statement in its Professional Conduct Standards. The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and the IEEE Computer Society have included in their Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct the importance of honesty (Gotterbarn and Impagliazzo, 2006). There is not a specific reference to plagiarism, but it does refer to honesty, including plagiarism, according to Gotterbarn and Impagliazzo (2006). And Wake Forest University describes plagiarism as a human rights issue, stating that, as a result of plagiarism, "a person loses not material possession, but something that characterized him or her as an individual. Plagiarism is a serious violation of another person's rights, whether the material stolen is great or small; it is not a matter of degree or intent."

Plagiarism and Academia

Rosamond (2002) quoted Standler (2000) as stating, "Reputations in academia are made on the basis of creating new knowledge: discoveries of new facts, new ways of looking at previously known facts... [and] original analysis of old ideas." Rosamond concludes, "By not plagiarizing, therefore, we reinforce the legitimacy of our profession as a valued 'scientific' pursuit."

There are a large number of articles and research dealing with the issue of plagiarism among students. For example, five articles were referenced by Martin (2005), who reported, "Research indicates that a high percentage of undergraduate students cheat." There are many more articles dealing with this issue. However, not many articles could be found about plagiarism in academia.

A search of the Internet indicates that there is more concern about cheating among students than among faculty. When "plagiarism among students" was

searched in Scholar.Google.com, 19,400 items showed up. When “plagiarism among college students” was searched in Scholar.Google.com, 12,700 items showed up. However, when “plagiarism among college faculty” was searched in Scholar.Google.com, 8,190 items showed up. When titles of these items were scanned, 90 percent of the articles dealt with students and detection methods of plagiarism. This lack of articles on “plagiarism among college faculty” could indicate either that there is little plagiarism among faculty or they are not willing to admit that there is a problem of plagiarism among faculty.

Some faculty may not want to admit there is a problem. Some people, such as Kock (1999), believe that due to the “pressure to publish to proceed up the ladder, or simply to keep a job, young tenure-track professors may be tempted to cheat their way up through the systems.” This may be the cause for not pursuing or admitting the problem of plagiarism.

Another reason could be the lack of legal precedent. Kock (1999) described his travails pursuing a plagiarist who copied a major portion of his article. After consulting many attorneys and colleagues, Kock was told he could not sue the plagiarist, who initially admitted plagiarism but later had the audacity to threaten to sue Kock for defamation of character. Eventually, the plagiarist finally admitted the plagiarism and apologized, but no compensation was paid. However, Kock reported that the plagiarist was later fired.

According to Gerard (2004), “Plagiarism can be a very difficult concept to grasp. After all, so many ideas and thoughts have been published already that it seems as though there are no original ideas anymore.” Thus, Girard states, “What we perceive to be original thoughts really may be opinions and ideas written down by others and subconsciously ingrained in us through things we have read or seen. This is a dilemma of writers.”

Also, academicians may not have the experience, time, or the tools to deal with this issue. For example, one reason for reluctance to face this issue has been proposed by Grossberg (2004): “Perhaps my biggest surprise was realizing how ill equipped I was to deal with the issue.”

Plagiarism occurs, but it does not mean we should look the other way or condone it when we catch someone plagiarizing. As stated previously, failure to hold plagiarists accountable will simply inhibit the generation of new ideas and encourage future plagiarists to reap undeserved rewards and recognition at the expense of other researchers and authors. Obviously, it will encourage unethical, immoral and unprofessional conduct among academicians, and, thus, the students can easily accuse the professor of the same behavior they are accused of. New ideas will not be

discovered and the old ideas will simply continue to be repackaged in new forms. This trend is disastrous for society and future generations. Therefore, this trend needs to be stopped before it takes hold in the disciplines and professions.

Fortunately, faculty eager to stop plagiarism among students have learned through experience how to help students avoid plagiarizing and, if students plagiarize, faculty have access to tools to catch them. According to Dye (2007), “the digital environment that makes plagiarizing content easier can make spotting poached pieces easier too.” For example, many students’ papers are submitted to computer detection programs for plagiarism. In addition, many universities have websites for helping students learn how to avoid plagiarism. Maxymuck (2006) lists websites of eight universities guiding faculty on how to detect plagiarism and websites of four universities helping students learn how to avoid plagiarism. He also lists websites of eleven universities that provide online tutorials to test students’ knowledge of plagiarism. As Dye (2007) suggests, “there are some strategies to make it harder for human thieves and scheming bots to steal the credit for someone else’s original ideas.” One of the ways to detect plagiarism is to use online free or commercially available, mainly software, services. “A good plagiarism software will compare published work in all sources, magazine, academic journals, books and billions of academic papers,” according to Harrel (2009). Many computer programs are available for detecting plagiarism. Some of the commonly used software are:

- Turnitin.com is an electronic plagiarism detection service which works with universities to help students prevent plagiarism.
- Schulz (2008) has reported that “The Indian scientist’s work was discovered by using a web-based tool called eTblast.”
- Bechhoefer (2007) recommended using arXiv software to look for “overlap or correlation with all arXiv submission. If enough of a match is found, a message [can] be sent to the submitter, listing the work(s) in which similarities have been detected.” If the submitter wishes to proceed, the editorial board should be notified as well as the submitter should be notified to provide justification for overlap work.
- CopyGauard (2005) created by LexisNexis and iThenticate uses match-and-report process which allows users to verify content originality quickly and easily. It produces a customized originality report that provides underlined excerpts of any relevant text

matches and similarity index.

- SafeAssignment (Maurer et al, 2006): An Internet service provided by Mydropbox has the ability to scan 8 billion Internet documents including 300,000 documents provided by Paper Mills. It also can access the proprietary archive of partners. The plagiarism results are presented to the user.
- Docol© (Maurer et al, 2006): An Internet service provided by Institut für Angewandte Lerntechnologien (IFALT). It provides text fragments (fingerprint size), date constraints, filtering and other reports.
- Eve2 (Essay Verification Engine) (Maurer et al, 2006). It tries to find plagiarized content in a given document.

After trying these software for detection, if one fails to find a paper, one might use the following commercial software (Harris 2009):

- www.plagiarism.com. Educational materials and a software screening.
- www.plagiarism.org. Online service that checks submitted student papers and paper mills.
- www.m4-software.com. Searches Internet sources.
- www.canexus.com/eve/. Searches the Web to compare a suspect paper with Internet content and shows site and degree of match.

However, even with modern technology, it is hard to detect most plagiarism. As Rosamond (2002) has stated, “The increasing sophistication of downloadable and electronically produced material is a contributory factor, as is the difficulty of actually spotting forms of plagiarism that amount to something other than direct copying.”

Further, most of the available tools are effective on documents available on electronic sources. However, Maurer et al (2006) suggest that these tools will fail if extensive paraphrasing takes place, documents are not available electronically, or documents are plagiarized in another language.

Clarke (2006) has suggested that while there are strong arguments for plagiarism, “copying without attribute can also be valuable.” He has stated that “avoiding plagiarism requires a great deal of effort.” He has also noted that there is a large amount of written and published material people have access to. Therefore, according to Clarke, it is:

Impractical to avoid repetition, uneconomic for every author to deliver originality in every element of everything he or she writes, and a waste of time and energy that could be applied to more constructive activities. Moreover, much writing within a discipline is intentionally cumulative, and hence the incorporation of prior content is an intrinsic feature of

almost all scholarly writing.

And Hexham (1992) has stated that “In judging that an author plagiarized, great care must be taken to ensure that careless mistakes, printing errors, inexperience, and even editorial changes made by a press are not used as accusations against an innocent person.”

Conclusion

Plagiarism is unethical and may be illegal in some cases. Therefore, there is no justification for plagiarizing. Parmley (2000) concluded that “A ‘publish-or-perish’ mentality must never degenerate into ‘plagiarism-and-publish’ mentality.” Hoover (2006) has argued that “...not preventing plagiarism will ultimately stop the free exchange of ideas in the profession.” Therefore, Hoover suggested that a profession can reduce or prevent plagiarism by

Reducing the cost of contesting plagiarized work; protecting those whose work has been plagiarized; detecting plagiarism through the use of software; reporting the plagiarists to their superior; publicizing the name of plagiarists after they have been notified and have been given opportunity to explain their behavior; developing a professional website supervised by a board of a few editors of national stature to monitor the policy regarding how to monitor or publicize plagiarism.”

Parmley (2000) suggested that all academicians and practitioners be reminded of the following:

- Plagiarism is WRONG no matter what the extent. It is a serious form of scientific misconduct
- As mentors, we must teach this both by example and by explicit statement.
- When we find it, we should deal with it firmly and appropriately in each situation.
- We all need to be more sensitive to the insidious nature of this problem.

Given the difficulty of defining, catching, and prosecuting plagiarists, Rosamond (2002) has suggested that “a more effective route toward the prevention of plagiaristic activity in academia involves thinking about effective ways of reinforcing academic good practices that do not rely solely on the coercive apparatuses of university and public statutes.” Therefore, he suggests moral persuasion rather than the threat of sanction. He further concludes that the institution, as a result, does not have to be a vigilante.

Gotterbarn et al (2006) suggest an organization

with clearly stated policies must “detect, deter, and discourage plagiarism.” They also suggest that the severity of punishment should be related to the extent (intentional, wholesale copying without citation, and unintentional, not citing because of a judgment call that it is a common knowledge) of plagiarism. Gotterbarn et al (2006) also suggest encouraging editors and reviewers to use software “to detect plagiarism.” They further suggest encouraging authors to use the same tools “to avoid intentional plagiarism.” They suggest that professional organizations should make available “open source anti-plagiarism instruments available to all authors.”

In cases of serious violation, authors should be censured with provision of appeal, suggest Gotterbarn et al (2006). In addition, organizations should institute a strict policy on plagiarism such as that of ACM. The policy should define plagiarism and self plagiarism, as ACM has, as well as define punishment. The punishment should include legal action, public humiliation, and fines. In order to ensure that the authors know about the violations and punishments, they should be required to sign an agreement and affirm the understanding when they sign the copyright transfer.

Grossberg (2004) concluded that, like other ethical issues, plagiarism has no simple solution. He states, “It can never be addressed effectively by simply turning journal editors and book and manuscript reviews into a disciplinary police force.” He suggests that all of us must “make a commitment to the basic standards of ethical conduct in our discipline, which includes preventing the misappropriation of other people’s words and ideas.”

Reid (1999) reported that “A case involving a freelance writer reveals U.S. copyright law does not provide a way to unequivocally determine rights on material published electronically.” Therefore, authors and editors believing that their published work could receive wide exposure on the Internet are prone to being plagiarized without any recourse. However, Kock (1999) has suggested that while having one’s work on the Internet makes plagiarism possible, it also allows for plagiarists to be caught for two reasons: 1) downloaded files or text can easily be traced to the sources, and 2) searches can be easily made with less time and expense.

Kock (1999) suggested that the best way to prevent plagiarists is “to publicize and discuss them as widely as possible.” Kock believed that the publicity should involve how to develop ethical standards in publication and how to deal with plagiarists when caught.

Plagiarism is a serious problem for the academic community in particular and society in general. Plagiarism frequently leads to rewards for those who cheat and take credit for someone else’s work. It sets a bad example for students and society. Fortunately, there are many methods available to prevent or at least curtail the

problem. However, to accomplish this goal, the academic community must make a concerted effort to be vigilant in all the work it creates, sees, and uncovers. The academic community must realize that as educators of society’s children, we must set an example of ethical, moral, and legal standards for students, for the public, and for society. We must understand that failing this serious obligation will have dire consequences for the future social and the economic well-being of the world. As Premeaux (2005) has stated, “acceptance of unethical behavior in college, like cheating, may make unethical behavior in business easier to accept.” Lawson (2004) found that “a large proportion of business students engage in unethical behavior, for they believe that they need to act unethically to advance their careers in the future.” Abdolmohammadi and Baker (2007) have argued “that students’ resorting to plagiarism in college may lead to them engaging in other types of unethical behavior in order to succeed in the accounting profession after graduation.” Therefore, plagiarism is a problem that must not be overlooked or swept under the rug.

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